Assigning Scores and Comments
Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Program

Summary

- You will access the applications assigned to you by clicking on a link provided to you in an email message from your IMLS primary contact.
- You will enter your scores and comments through the IMLS Online Reviewer System.
- Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services (NANH) panel review uses a 7-point scale for each of three sections of the application narrative: Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results.
- Scores are in whole numbers only. Fractions, ranges, decimals, and zeroes are not allowed.
- You must write a constructive and substantive comment of between 30 and 2000 characters in length for each section of the application narrative.
- All three sections of the narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.
- Address your comments to the applicant, not to IMLS or to panel reviewers.
- Each comment should reflect the numeric score you provide for the corresponding section of the narrative.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Verify Access to Applications**
   Use the link provided to you in an email message from your IMLS primary contact to access the applications assigned to you. Make sure you see all the applications referenced in the email, and then open and download each to your computer in a secure place that is not accessible to others. Call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if any applications are missing or if you cannot open them.

   > **Confidentiality in IMLS Peer Review:** The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications.

2. **Verify Access to IMLS Online Reviewer System**
   Use the following link to verify that you have access to the IMLS Online Reviewer System:

   https://e-services.imls.gov/grantapps/reviewers.aspx

   To login, enter the email address you have on file with IMLS, and use the default password: **password**. An **E-Review Security Screen** will appear. Read this page and click **OK.** Next, create a user account and establish your own password.

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3. **Assess Potential Conflicts of Interest**

   After you have created a new password, click **REVIEW GROUPS,** and your review assignment will appear. To access the list of applications assigned to you, click **VIEW**.

   Read through your list of applications again to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. Please see "Complying With Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest."

   CAUTION: Depending on your computer's operating system and/or the browser you use, you *may* see a screen with a column labeled "Conflicts" with a checkable box by each application. **Do not check any of these boxes** as doing so will disable access to the system and make it impossible for others in your review group to do their work. Instead, call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if you have a conflict, or what may appear to be a conflict.

   If you have no conflicts of interest with any of the applicants on the list, click **SUBMIT CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT** at the bottom of page.

4. **Read Applications**

   Revisit the NANH guidelines at http://www.imls.gov/applicants/2014_nanh_guidelines.aspx. Then read the applications, keeping in mind the review criteria for each section of the narrative. You will not need to reference each bullet point in your comments, but these questions should guide your thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of each application. You can also access these review criteria as a separate document to keep handy as you read your applications.

To evaluate the **Project Justification**, consider the following:
- Is the project clearly explained?
- Is the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed clearly identified and supported by relevant evidence?
- Are the people who will benefit from the project clearly identified, and have they been involved in planning this project?
- Are the materials (e.g. objects, specimens, collections) that are the focus of the project and their current condition described and quantified in sufficient detail? (if applicable)
- Are the intended results well formulated and achievable?
- Are the ways in which this project strengthens museum services specific, actionable, and measurable?

To evaluate the **Project Work Plan**, consider the following:
- Are the proposed activities, technologies, and/or methodologies informed by appropriate theory and practice?
- Are the technical details including all information required using the *Digital Content Supplementary Information Form* provided for projects generating digital products?
- Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers possess the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully?
- Is the schedule of work realistic and achievable?
- Are the time, personnel, and financial resources identified appropriate for the scope and scale of the project?
- Does the institution provide evidence of its capacity to carry out the project activities and meet the cost-share requirement?
- Is a clear methodology described for tracking the project's progress and adjusting course when necessary?
- Is there an effective plan for communicating results and/or sharing discoveries?

To evaluate the **Project Results,** consider the following:
- Are the project's intended results clearly articulated?
- Will direct collections care, organizational capacity for collections care, and/or public awareness of the importance of collection care improve as a result of this project? (if applicable)
- Will the tangible products be useful?
- Are the measures of success in achieving results appropriate for the project?
- Is there a reasonable and practical plan for sustaining the benefits of the project beyond the conclusion of this grant?

5. **Draft Comments**

You must write a constructive and substantive comment for each section of the narrative for each application you review. All three sections of the narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.

To organize notes for writing your comments, you may wish to use the "Panel Review Notes Template." Think about the review criteria for each section of the application narrative as listed above, and be sure to consider all the required components of the application as well as relevant Supporting Documents as resources for your assessment. Draft your comments using a word-processing program for later copying and pasting into the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Remember that each comment must be between 30 and 2000 characters long.

When drafting your comments …
- use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- judge the application on its own merits, and do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- if you question the accuracy of any information, call us—not the applicant—to discuss it.

Effective comments …	Poor comments…
- are presented in a constructive manner. - are concise, specific, and easy to read and understand. - reflect the resources of the institution. - are specific to the individual application. - reflect the numeric score assigned. - reflect the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement. - are directed to applicants—not IMLS or panel reviewers—for their use.	- simply summarize or paraphrase the applicant's own words. - make derogatory remarks. - penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money. - offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information. - make vague or overly general statements. - question an applicant's honesty or integrity.

Make sure your comments justify the scores you provide. A highly complementary comment does not "remove the sting" of a low score, and a negative comment does not "even out" a high one. Comments and scores must complement each other and make sense as a whole.

Below are some examples of **effective** field reviewer comments:

Project Justification	
"You clearly identify the project need and propose an innovative solution, and have done a good job of working with the community to identify future goals. The project	*Comment is substantive, addresses*

partners add needed expertise and have been involved in the development of the project. Your intended results are well reasoned, well formulated, and achievable. The proposed project will definitely improve the tribe's museum services and is an excellent fit with the Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services program."	*the review criteria, and employs a positive tone.*
"A strength of the application is the recognition of the initial development of collections care and management policies intended to manage the museum's extensive collections. With this, the need for a collections management project seems consistent with institutional priorities and community interests. A major weakness to the success of this goal is the lack of expertise on staff regarding appropriate archival management and digital collections management skills. The proposal notes that a staff member will provide oversight and lead a project intern whose duties will be to inventory the collections. However her resume provides no indication as to her skill set in collections management or care. For a better opportunity of success, the museum should refer to recommendations highlighted in their CAP report suggesting that staff take courses on collections management and care and/or work directly with museum professionals to create an improved understanding of collections care procedures and policies."	*Comment correlates with the score of 3 and makes implementable suggestions for improving the project.*
Project Work Plan	
"Your work plan is clear and outlines specific activities necessary for achieving your goals. I applaud you for including well qualified consultants who are well versed in developing exhibitions and interpretive planning." "You might consider adding additional prototype testing during the exhibition development process. This will allow you to assess the proposed hands-on activities and displays and make necessary alterations before fabrication."	*Comment provides a constructive assessment of the application and suggestions likely to benefit the applicant.*
"Although the plan to purchase additional storage shelves/systems should be straightforward, your proposal demonstrates some problems. Some of the storage equipment suggested for purchase is off-the-shelf, and may not be best suited for a museum environment due to off-gassing concerns. There are companies that supply shelving and cabinets specifically designed for museums and repositories. Getting quotes from these companies would be a plus and will assist with your planning efforts. Consider purchasing closed cabinets and shelving that are not only fire-resistant, but water-resistant, too."	*Comment correlates with score of 2 and makes specific implementable suggestions for improving the project.*
Project Results	
"The proposal provides strong evidence that the project will positively impact the participants involved and the greater tribal community who desire a more accurate understanding of tribal culture and history. This particular interaction between traditional practitioners and community members continues a pattern of dynamic community collaborations, therefore fulfilling important intended project outcomes. The combination of outcome based models for project evaluation with the detailed oversight of staff committed to the project promotes confidence that the project will successfully achieve the proposed results."	*Comment addresses questions from the review criteria*

In contrast, below are some examples of **poor** field reviewer comments:

Project Justification

"Primary emphasis is placed on a need for collections storage. A discussion of the generation of educational materials is also presented, but to a lesser degree. The project will be two years in length."	*Comment paraphrases the applicant's own words.*
"Is revenue and expenditures report mandatory on Program Information Sheet? If so, this section was lacking information."	*Comment addresses status of application component. Reviewer should have contacted IMLS for clarification prior to including statement in review.*
Project Work Plan	
"The design of the exhibition is boring and not even remotely relevant to the cultural center. The staff is woefully unprepared and will fail in the execution of this project. Targeting federal funds to this museum is a mistake."	*Comment is derogatory and does not provide useful feedback.*
Project Results	
"Strong results with very sustainable benefits."	*Comment is very brief and has little worth or value to the applicant.*

The chart below summarizes the most frequently asked questions from NANH panel reviewers:

Should I consider … ?	Yes	No
Whether a project strengthens museum services	X	
An institution's financial or staffing needs		X
Whether the project is well planned and the organization has the appropriate resources to complete the project	X	
Whether the applicant has included the information necessary for an adequate evaluation of its merits	X	
Whether a project is new or a resubmission		X
The size or age of the organization		X
An institution's indirect cost rate		X

6. **Assign Scores**

   Assign a preliminary score for the overall project keeping all three narrative questions in mind. Use a scale of 1 to 7, as described below. Use only whole numbers; do not use fractions, ranges, decimals, or zeroes.

SCORE DEFINITIONS	
7 – Exceptional	The applicant's response is exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses in its support of the proposed project.
6 – Excellent	The applicant's response is very strong with no more than one minor weakness in its support of the proposed project
5 – Very Good	The applicant's response is strong with only a few minor weaknesses in its support for the proposed project.
4 – Good	The applicant's response is adequate but with numerous minor weaknesses in its support for the proposed project.
3 – Some Merit	The applicant's response may have some strengths but has at least one moderate weakness in its support for the proposed project.
2 – Poor	The applicant's response is deficient and has at least one major weakness in its support of the proposed project.
1 – Inadequate/Insufficient	The applicant's response is either inadequate or insufficient to evaluate fully and/or has numerous major weaknesses in its support of the proposed project.
Minor	*An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen the impact of the project*
Moderate	*A weakness that lessens the impact of the project*
Major	*A weakness that severely limits the impact of the project*

7. **Review Your Work**

   Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. A review with even one missing score or comment cannot be accepted by the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to reflect more accurately your written evaluation. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

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8. **Enter Scores and Comments**
   Return to the IMLS Online Reviewer System at

   https://e-services.imls.gov/grantapps/reviewers.aspx

   Login with the email address you have on file with IMLS and the password you created in Step 2. Go to your list of assigned applications and click **REVIEW** beside any of them to begin.

   Copy and paste your comments into the appropriate blue blocks for each section of the narrative for each application. Be sure to save each comment by clicking **SAVE** at the bottom of the page before you move on to the next one. After entering comments in all three sections, go to the Application Overview section and choose a numeric score between 1 and 7 from the **SCORE** dropdown menu. Use the controls on the side or top of the screen to navigate between sections.

   Once you have completed assigning scores and providing comments for each application assigned to you, we recommend that you print a copy of each completed review to keep for your files. Then click on **I AM READY TO SUBMIT THIS REVIEW TO IMLS** to send all your work to IMLS.

   At this point, you will not be able to re-enter the IMLS Online Reviewer System unless you notify your IMLS primary contact.

   For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, please call or email your IMLS primary contact directly.

9. **Manage Your Copies**
   Keep your applications and a copy of each review sheet until **September 30, 2014,** in case there are questions from IMLS staff. Continue to maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review by keeping electronic and paper copies in a secure place. After September 30, 2014, destroy the applications and the review sheets.

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